

Results of MRG Questionnaire 2001

17 responses; 14 from Universities and higher education institutes (2 from abroad), 3 from government bodies and none from PhD students,

3. What do you feel have been the strengths of the MRG?

Over the last three years:

- Not many! In my view the group has been rather moribund recently. The email discussion group is a good idea but hasn't worked as well as hoped. If the membership were greater perhaps there would be more email discussion.
- Informal meetings among members, (and very few) discussions on the email list.
- Drawing together a body of people with expertise to give each issue raised (e.g. problem on a site) thorough attention and a considered response.
- Raising the profile of mires via BES
- Newsletter (the paper based one)
- The MRG has a great breadth of expertise and interest among it's members; understanding of wetlands can only advance effectively using a multi-proxy approach, and the MRG is a useful forum for that approach.
- Potentially to develop fuller collaborative groupings
- Organising interesting symposia, distributing the Newsletter, BES-Web-network
- Its organisation of field meetings
- Relatively little
- Meeting other managers on group field meetings

-Since its formation:

- In the past the group has sponsored some good conferences and has held some good research field trips. The group has acted as a focus for primarily UK-based mire science and has also facilitated useful contact between managers and scientists. It has given the opportunities for old and young to meet informally and exchange ideas and had brought together people from different disciplines with common interest in mires. It has adopted an integrated approach – mixture of biology/ecology and palaeo. A good range of expertise
- MRG sessions and meetings at BES Winter Conference

4. What do you think has been the best MRG achievement(s)?

-Over the last three years:

- E-mail discussion group.
- Putting together the Changing Wetlands conference in Sheffield.
- Newsletter (as long as it was running!)

-Since its formation:

- Conferences (e.g. Carbon dynamics, Nottingham 1992; Pools in patterned mires, Durham 1998)
- Field visits
- Peatland publications on sites visited

5. What do you see as being the role of the MRG at present?

- It doesn't have much a role at the moment. Recently, it has become rather dominated by conservation/management interests with virtually no focus on science.
- Very fragile at the moment. There seems to be a lot of apathy, perhaps due to members having no clear 'vision' of why the MRG exists and what is possible within it.
- A forum for sharing information and seeking advice, publishing information and focussing attention on mire conservation.
- Connecting researchers on mire ecology in Europe.
- To facilitate networking between people with similar research interests.
- As a site manager the strengths have been the blend of science and field expertise. With a constant turnover of people in both the science and practical areas there is a crying need to keep bringing peatland people together. To maintain and update the science base that site managers work from. To bring scientists into contact with practitioners and to keep them focussed on real restoration problems. To stimulate interest in monitoring restoration work. We must meet to discuss issues and to draw widely on the bank of expertise that now exists. We must also push our knowledge into Europe. MRG needs to be a catalyst.
- Provide a cross disciplinary forum for scientists involved in wetland research.
- Keep up the mire profile
- useful link between academics and practitioners; focus for mire-based researchers
- Provider of a forum for discussing wetlands issues (e.g. sessions at BES meeting).
- A forum for information exchange among mire specialists and a provider of learning opportunities for its members.

6. What would you like the role of the MRG to be and how could this be done?

- The conservation part of the MRG is important and should remain. However, we need more focus on scientific work. Perhaps this could be done through small science-based workshops/meetings and field trips.
- I would like the MRG to be a 'point of contact' for people to meet others of complementary interests. In practical terms, this means providing forums (mini-conferences, BES meeting, email list) for lively discussion of topical issues.
- Widen horizons a bit so that not so totally academic
- Facilitate meetings and field meetings; so few of them go to wetlands. I would also like to see a higher profile of conservation and promoting conservation amongst its activities.
- Be more proactive in organising conference sessions at BES Winter Meeting, or independently (e.g. the Sheffield one in September) together with the SWS or IMCG
- It is important that the MRG keep the mire neoecology/palaeoecology visible and active in the eyes of the BES. The conference with the SWS in September is a great opportunity and we would like to see something like that happen every 2-4 years, to bring together the wetland community.
- Take on some identification workshops particularly of Sphagnum and the relevant NVC communities
- Make the listserv &/or a newsletter &/or Web page more stimulating;

A few suggestions:

- (1) annotated bibliographies of recent papers/books, or just a quick note sent to a newsletter editor of 'here's a cool paper I read recently' which could be compiled into a list
- (2) short articles on 'key' papers in particular fields whether recent or old, explaining why they were so important
- (3) short descriptions of 'work in progress', or of sites worked on
- (4) 'debates'; people with different views on particular issues. Each write a short piece.
- (5) Reports on meetings
- (6) News about individuals activities
- (7) List of new PhD students starting mires based topics
- (8) Short biographies/interests of new members.
- (9) Mini-paper series where people float first interpretations of provisional data.

7. How can we attract more young members (PhD students)?

- Have **more science-based activities**. By holding relevant meetings (eg visits to their research sites), organise international conferences such as the changing wetland conference

➤ **Broaden the remit.**

- (1) Attract palaeoecologist;
 - (2) consider changing the name to the “Wetlands Ecology Group” to attract people working on other types of freshwater wetlands (e.g., riparian zones, shallow lakes) or even coastal wetlands (e.g., saltmarshes).
 - (3) Microbiologist, molecular ecologists
- **A good MRG homepage** Better information about objectives and available information, advertise existence of MRG. Getting existing members to contribute to a web page. Telling them that if they really need to whose who in bogs then MRG is the place to get known.
- **Encourage post-grads to meet up and swap news/grievances/experiences** (a post-grad meeting once a year-evening session at the BES?) Need to get supervisors engaged, demonstrating that it’s useful.
- **Don’t just concentrate on PhD students** –Younger members could include those involved in practical conservation issues – some people put off by the heavy academic weighting attached to this group

8. Do you want weekend field visits?

- 6 Yes (and workshops)
- Would prefer working day meetings I'm afraid life is now too short to give up weekends
- Cannot afford the time (9)

9. Suggestions for weekend field sessions for the coming three years:

- Andy Beard would be happy to lead short visits (with a hydrological focus) to fens in Broadland and possibly also a lowland raised mire site in England or Wales. This could include the request by Michael Trepel (Kiel University) of demonstrations of hydrological field measurements, evaluation tools and a critical discussion of the available methods. Jane Bunting supports the Norfolk trip planned. She is part of a team doing a modern pollen rain study down there she thinks it might be good to use the planning that has been done there for the Changing Wetland meeting. Also suggested (Fenn's/Whixall Moss) by Frank Chambers.

- Notwithstanding, Frank Mawby (EN) would be willing to do a weekend on the Solway Mosses, might be able to lay on an archaeologist, Margaret Cox, and a demo of peat depthing by ground radar, Erica Utsi. Next May? John Proctor, Stirling University, also suggested Solway Mosses
- Latest developments regarding SACs and favourable conservation status; condition assessment. These could be accommodated at a number of sites within the protected areas network e.g. local sites to Greater Manchester include Red Moss, Astley and Bedford Mosses, Wigan Flashes (Bryn Marsh and Ince Moss), Holcroft Moss, Risley Moss. (Pat Waring)
- Thorne and Hatfield Moors; some of the Irish bogs (Nicki Whitehouse)

10. Do you want summer field meetings?

- No due to difficulty in committing time (7).
- Only if they are associated with a larger meeting, i.e., a workshop or mini-conference.
- 5 Yes.

11. Two people made suggestions:

- (1) France, Northern Ireland, Scotland (Mhoine Mhor near Lochgilphead and Claish Moss in Argyll)
- (2) Visits to Hebridean islands to look at mires and perhaps attempt botanical inventories (eg Colonsay, Eigg). Needs to be an attractive geographical location.

12. Are there any pressing research questions which would benefit from us pooling together our expertise/equipment? Any suggestions?

- Yes, many! E.g. (i) I'm interested in knowing more about the relative importance of surface and shallow-subsurface (acrotelm) runoff in lowland raised mires in the winter. (ii) I'd also be interested in tracing flow in strongly patterned hummock and hollow complexes. (iii) I'd be interested in knowing more about the buoyancy of fen root mats and how this varies seasonally and its ecological implications.
- One issue which (much to my horror) keeps cropping up in Edinburgh is 'carbon management', i.e., planting trees on bogs to sequester carbon and stop them emitting methane. Perhaps a small sub-group of the MRG would be interested in putting together a booklet for the BES 'Ecological Issues' series on the role of peatlands in the carbon cycle. This would need to put the science in an economic, social and political context.

- Improving the understanding between hydrology flow patterns and ecological conditions (species), especially with some real data at different scales
- The key issue, I'd say, is one of integration of approaches and aspects of wetlands, development of a more holistic approach, or at least a greater awareness of the many factors involved in the whole wetland system - Scaling from the single core/piezometer network/lysimeter/quadrat to the whole mire-and-catchment system
- Most wetland studies benefit from us pooling our expertise! And equipment is often in short supply! As a way of fostering working together, transferring best practise, comparing methodologies in terms of cost/skill level/repeatability, providing training etc., and doing valuable research, it would be really interesting if a group could work collectively on a mire, say a nature reserve where there was decent access and local interest -identifying key issues, developing simple and low-cost strategies to address them using the full range of methods, and getting individuals to all chip in a bit of work (e.g. turn up & help survey or core or whatever). It would be really interesting to 'design in' a range of methods, rather than add them on later, or have the project driven entirely by one aspect of the site. It might also be a way to stimulate group discussion and engagement - if a local-ish group of researchers (say people within 90 minute's travelling time) representing different approaches could take on a more active role, and feed back results etc. to the wider group... possibly becoming grant holders at some stage.
- Take a look at the possibilities and challenges there are in the framework of the Ramsar Global Action Plan for Peatlands (GAPP). See www.imcg.net/docum/gapp.htm

13. Use our national (or even international) geographical distribution

- Excellent idea. Too few sites seem to have useful surveillance work being carried out and made available. This should change with the common standards approach to monitoring designated sites, but it still needs a body such as MRG to encourage its development.
- Question is whether MRG should do research itself or only exchange information and let the members take the lead in organising projects.
- MRG is a good source of contacts/collaborators for such research. Perhaps it should be content to be just that, rather than pursue its own research agenda?

Better ideas?

- I think some research and management problems would benefit from looking at processes on several sites.
- I don't think we have the resources to carry out new research as a group. It would be useful to find out what databases already exist (e.g., SNH, RSPB peatland surveys) and

what research programmes are running currently, and where. I'm not sure what the best way to do this would be, though.

- bes-mrg could be a forum to find partners for proposals for the EU research framework
- mire ontogeny?
- The Rodwell idea sounds fun - for example, we could actually use such revisits to test his suggestions about successional relationships, the effects of disturbance regime etc. by revisiting sites where changes in external factors are known to have occurred, or which were occupied by communities which were marginal or transitional in character... If anyone is keen to do that, I would LOVE to get some surface samples (mosses, sediment scrapes) from the areas where vegetation recording is being done in different NVCs, in order to look at the pollen signal -NVCs can be told apart in the field, and allow generalisations about the habitat/environmental factors etc. to be made about a spot. I want to know what the pollen (& plant macrofossil) signal of these communities looks like and whether they are distinguishable from the pollen record alone - if they are, then that will enable me to (a) apply the increasing body of ecological knowledge based on NVCs to get better reconstructions of past environments, (b) look at patterns of change in wetlands in terms of NVCs, again looking at questions of succession, transition between NVCs etc. and (c) even reconstruct palaeo NVC maps for comparison with modern NVC maps for particular wetlands, if multiple cores are available, which could be really interesting in terms of understanding landscape evolution, past human activities/responses to landscape, and controls on landscape dynamics...

14. Future MRG activities

- Identification workshops, e.g. *Sphagnum*. Also, please can you ensure you promotes invertebrates - at so many of MRG's meetings things were perhaps understanding dominated by a rather "plantcentric" point of view; invertebrates of mires are also extremely important and vital in understanding an ecosystem.
- One day discussion meetings, preferably reasonably wide-ranging themes, perhaps defined by method/topic rather than geographic area (for example, ecological monitoring - how, why, successes & problems) - this sort of thing might be appealing to non-academics whilst being useful to grad students & others, yet appeal to a wider audience than something geographically specific.
- Organise a special session within INTERCOL
- More of the MRG's knowledge, resources, membership, work etc should be accessible and used by members of the Peatlands Campaign Consortium and the peatlands conservation effort. As well as knowledge about UK bogs, consideration should also be given to Irish and Baltic raised bogs, which becoming increasingly important sources of

peat as the commercial net for bog exploitation is cast ever wider. And with devolution gaining ever more momentum, there is a need to provide a cohesive overview of state and resource of bogs across the UK.

Outcomes:

1. Make the listserv &/or a newsletter become more stimulating of debate (decide whether we have a paperbase version) and generally improve information about the MRG - make the objectives available
2. Make a European Wetland conference a regular event. Not every year but perhaps every two. The MRG could clearly play a role, though we would need to get some continental groups (or at least a set of people) involved.
3. Offer a thematic session for the BES meeting 2002
4. One day discussion meetings or workshops
5. Organise field meetings